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## 'Lacinato' Kale for Home Gardens

Tim Motis

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Consider growing kale if you are looking for a nutritious, leafy vegetable that you can easily incorporate into your garden and eat in a variety of ways. Kale (*Brassica oleracea* var. *acephala*) is in the same family of plants as cabbage, broccoli, and collards. Kale is a low-calorie food high in essential minerals (Thavarajah *et al.*, 2016) and vitamins (Šamec *et al.*, 2018).

Kale cultivars differ in leaf color, shape, and texture. Here we focus on a cultivar called 'Lacinato' which has unique narrow, blue-green, rough-textured leaves known for their sweetness. The following traits make it a versatile garden plant:

- Seeds can be sown in small containers or trays and then transplanted, or they can be sown directly into garden beds. Aim for a final spacing of 30 to 46 cm between plants. Seedlings can be eaten as they are removed to obtain the desired spacing.
- Immature as well as older leaves can be harvested. If interested in eating the leaves of young seedlings, sow seeds 5 cm apart to achieve a denser planting.
- Leaves can be eaten fresh or cooked in various ways (e.g., boiled, steamed, fried).
- Kale is a cool-season vegetable that also has some heat tolerance. Temperatures between 10° and 25°C are optimal for growth of kale and related plants (e.g., cabbage, broccoli; McCormack, 2005). Cooler temperatures result in the best flavor. If you want to grow it in warmer conditions, try growing it under partial shade (Figure 9).



**Figure 9.** Example of growing greens (mustard pictured) under shade structures. You can moderate the amount of shade with the amount of branches added to the top of the structure. *Source:* Stacy Swartz

ECHO staff member, Stacy Swartz shared the following, based on her experience with Lacinato kale in Tanzania:



- Maximize harvest by retaining only the top three to five leaves. Harvest the lower leaves to increase leaf production. If you intensively harvest like this, you can space plants closer together (30 cm instead of 46 cm).
- Remove all of the leaf petiole (stem) when harvesting, as parts that remain can rot (which can lead to disease problems).
- It takes longer to cook Lacinato kale than other leafy greens like mustard and collard greens. This is because of leaf thickness. Thicker leaves, however, also make Lacinato kale more resistant to most of the pests that eat those greens (mostly caterpillars and aphids).
- It grew well in keyhole gardens (Figure 10) or beds (raised in the rainy season, sunken in the dry season) but the crop grows too tall for sack gardens, shading out plants below
- It grew well at high elevation (Arusha is about 1,400 m).

**Figure 10.** Lacinato kale plant (top) and example of growing it in a keyhole garden (bottom). *Source:* Evan Clements, Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 license (top) and Stacy Swartz (bottom)

## References

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